Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 04 MAY 2006

Message Text

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 01 BEIRUT 08163 271548Z

70
ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 ISO-00 DHA-02 MCT-01 CIAE-00 DODE-00

PM-04 H-02 INR-07 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01

SP-02 SS-15 USIA-06 IO-13 /085 W
---------- 102151
R 271355Z OCT 76
FM AMEMBASSY BEIRUT
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 2135
INFO AMEMBASSY CAIRO
AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS
AMEMBASSY JIDDA
AMEMBASSY KUWAIT
AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV
AMEMBASSY LONDON

C O N F I D E N T I A L BEIRUT 8163

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PFOR, PINS, LE, US
SUBJECT: CONVERSATION WITH MALEK SALAM

1. SUMMARY. DURING DISCUSSION OCT 26, BEIRUT SUNNI LEADER MALEK SALAM EXPRESSED OPTIMISM THAT CURRENT CEASE-FIRE WOULD HOLD FOR AT LEAST A MONTH, DESCRIBED DETERIORATION OF RELATIONS BETWEEN LEBANESE SUNNI MOSLEMS AND PALESTINIANS, GAVE HIS VIEWS ON FORMATION OF A NEW COUNCIL OF MINISTERS AND DISCUSSED RECENT DEVELOPMENTS IN SOUTH LEBANON. END SUMMARY.

2. CHARGE CALLED ON MALEK SALAM OCT 26. MALEK SALAM, WHO IS YOUNGER BROTHER OF FORMER PRIMIN SAEB SALAM AND BROTHER-IN-LAW OF PRESIDENT PRIMIN RASHID KARAME, HAS BEEN MENTIONED BY SEVERAL SOURCES AS A POSSIBLE CANDIDATE FOR PRIME MINISTER IN SARKIS GOVT. DURING CONVERSATION, HE COMMENTED ON FOLLOWING SUBJECTS.
CONFIDENTIAL

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PAGE 02 BEIRUT 08163 271548Z

Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 04 MAY 2006

Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 04 MAY 2006

3. THE CURRENT CEASE-FIRE. HE WAS BASICALLY OPTIMISTIC THAT CURRENT CEASE-FIRE WOULD HOLD FOR AT LEAST NEXT FEW WEEKS, BASED PRIMARILY ON THE "MORAL AUTHORITY" OF THE FOUR POWERS THAT WERE SPONSORING IT--EGYPT, SYRIA, SAUDI ARABIA AND KUWAIT. HE MENTIONED TWO OTHER POSSIBLE REASONS FOR DECREASE IN SHELLING SINCE OCT 21: (1) BOTH SIDES WERE BEGINNING TO HIDE THEIR HEAVY WEAPONS SO THAT THEY WOULD NOT BE CONFISCATED BY ARAB LEAGUE FORCE, AND (2) THE EXTREMISTS ON BOTH SIDES, WHO TENDED TO START THE FIGHTING, HAD RUN OUT OF AMMUNITION AND THE MODERATES WOULD NOT GIVE THEM ANY MORE. MALEK SALAM SAID THAT IN HIS VIEW THE KEY TO ESTABLISHING A PERMANENT CEASE-FIRE WAS THE CONTROL AND REOPENING OF THE AIRPORT. HE HAD ADVISED PRESIDENT SARKIS THAT AS SOON AS HE RETURNED FROM CAIRO, HE SHOULD CAREFULLY ORGANIZE A COMMITTEE REPRESENTING ALL SIDES TO SUPERVISE OPERATION AT THE AIRPORT AND THEN ANNOUNCE IN NATION-WIDE SPEECH TO LEBANESE PEOPLE THAT AIRPORT WAS TO BE REOPENED, THAT IT WOULD BE USED STRICTLY TO SUPPLY ARAB LEAGUE FORCE AND FOR CIVILIAN PURPOSES, AND THAT ANY ATTEMPT TO INTERFERE WITH THIS TRAFFIC WOULD IMMEDIATELY BE DEALT WITH SEVERELY, BY AIR ATTACK IF NECESSARY.
SUCH AN ARRANGEMENT MUST BE MADE AND STRICTLY ENFORCED OR ARAB LEAGUE FORCE AND THE PRESIDENT WOULD LOSE THEIR AUTHORITY AND THE WAR WOULD RESUME.

4. THE PEACE-KEEPING FORCE. REACTING TO NEWS REPORTS WHICH SAID THAT PLO WOULD PARTICIPATE IN ARAB PEACE FORCE IN LEBANON, MR. SALAM SAID THAT THIS WOULD CAUSE TROUBLE WITH THE CHRISTIANS. SOME OF THEIR FORCES WOULD HAVE TO BE INCLUDED, PERHAPS AS LEBANESE FORCES, TO BALANCE PLO PARTICIPATION. HE NOTED THAT PEACE-KEEPING FORCES WOULD HAVE TO BE DEPLOYED IN ALL PARTS OF BEIRUT AS A SUBSTITUTE FOR INTERNAL SECURITY FORCES (I.E., POLICE) AT LEAST IN THE INITIAL STAGES. ONLY IN THIS WAY COULD LAW AND ORDER BE REESTABLISHED.

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5. MOSLEM LEBANESE-PALESTINIAN RELATIONS. MALEK SALAM SAID THAT RELATIONS BETWEEN MOSLEM LEBANESE AND THE PALESTINIANS HAD WORSENED PRIMARILY FOR THREE REASONS: FIRST, ARMED PALESTINIANS HAD BEGUN TO THROW THEIR WEIGHT AROUND IN BEIRUT; HE TOLD A LONG STORY ABOUT A BEIRUT TAXI DRIVER WHO WAS SUMMARILY ARRESTED AND QUESTIONED BY TWO ARMED PALESTINIANS, AND ALSO NOTED THAT WEST BEIRUTIS WHO

Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 04 MAY 2006

Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 04 MAY 2006

HAD TO QUEUE UP FOR HOURS TO GET BREAD AND GASOLINE VERY MUCH RESENTED SEEING ARMED PALESTINIANS GO TO HEAD OF THE LINE AND GET ALL OF THESE COMMODITIES THEY WANTED. SECOND, HE MENTIONED THE GREAT MATERIAL DESTRUCTION FROM SHELLING IN BEIRUT AND IMPLIED THAT PALESTINIANS WERE PREPARED TO FIGHT UNTIL LAST LEBANESE-OWNED BUILDING HAD BEEN DESTROYED. FINALLY, HE SAID, THE SUNNI MOSLEMS OF BEIRUT, WHO HAD SUPPORTED PALESTINIAN CAUSE FOR YEARS, DEEPLY RESENTED FACT THAT ARAFAT HAD ALLIED HIMSELF SO CLOSELY WITH THE MAVERICK JUNBLATT. HE REMARKED THAT JUNBLATT AND CHAMOUN (CAMILLE AND KAMAL) HAD CAUSED A GREAT DEAL OF DESTRUCTION IN LEBANON IN LAST SIX MONTHS.

6. FORMATION OF A NEW GOVERNMENT. MALEK SALAM THOUGHT THAT SARKIS SHOULD WAIT FOR THREE OR FOUR WEEKS AFTER THE ARAB LEAGUE FORCE WAS IN PLACE BEFORE TRYING TO FORM A NEW GOVERNMENT. IN HIS VIEW, FIRST STEP WAS THE ORGANIZATION OF A ROUND-TABLE OF ALL LEBANESE PARTIES, AT WHICH A POLITICAL/ ECONOMIC RECONSTRUCTION PROGRAM ACCEPTABLE TO MOST LEBANESE WOULD BE HAMMERED OUT. ONCE THIS HAD BEEN DONE, SARKIS COULD SELECT A MINISTERIAL TEAM AND REQUEST PARLIAMENTARY APPROVAL FOR NEW CABINET, THE RECONSTRUCTION PROGRAM, AND EXCEPTIONAL POWERS TO IMPLEMENT IT. SALAM SAID IT WAS TOO EARLY TO SPECULATE ON WHETHER NEW CABINET MEMBERS SHOULD BE POLITICIANS OR TECHNICIANS.

7. SITUATION IN SOUTH LEBANON. IN A LONG DISCUSSION OF SITUATION IN SOUTH LEBANON, MALEK SALAM SAID THAT THE BIG LOSER AS RESULT OF RIYADH AGREEMENT WOULD CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 04 BEIRUT 08163 271548Z

BE THE PLO, AND THE WINNER WAS ISRAEL. HE SAID THE MOST USEFUL THING UNITED STATES CAN DO FOR LEBANON AT THIS POINT IS TO TELL ISRAELIS TO STOP. HE DID NOT SEEM TERRIBLY UPSET BY SITUATION AT THE MOMENT, BUT SAID THAT IF THERE WERE FURTHER ISRAELI MILITARY INCURSIONS AND CONTINUED ISRAELI MILITARY ASSISTANCE AND ARMS SHIPMENT TO THE CHRISTIANS, IT COULD ONLY EXACERBATE THE SITUATION. IF THE ISRAELIS OCCUPY LEBANON SOUTH OF LITANI, HE SAID, ALL LEBANESE AND ARABS WILL UNITE AGAINST THIS AGGRESSION; IF THEY STOP NOW, THEY WILL HAVE ACHIEVED THEIR BASIC GOAL OF CREATING A CORDON SANITAIRE BETWEEN THEMSELVES AND PALESTINIANS, AND LEBANESE WILL NOT TRY TO BREAK IT. "THE CAIRO ACCORDS ARE A DEAD LETTER IN THE SOUTH," HE SAID.

Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 04 MAY 2006

Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 04 MAY 2006

8. MR. SALAM SAID THAT THE ALLIANCE BETWEEN CHRISTIANS AND SHIITES IN THE SOUTH WAS REALLY A MARRIAGE OF CONVENIENCE, BECAUSE THEY HAVE A COMMON ENEMY--THE FEDAYEEN. SOUTHERN LEBANESE HAD BITTER MEMORIES OF ISRAELI ATTACKS AGAINST THEIR AREA BROUGHT ON BY FEDAYEEN RAIDS. THEY HAD WILLINGLY COOPERATED WITH THE ISRAELIS, NOT ONLY BECAUSE ISRAELI POLICY HAD BEEN VERY CLEVER IN PROVIDING THEM WITH FACILITIES THEY DESPERATELY NEEDED, BUT ALSO BECAUSE THE SOUTHERNERS FELT, AND RIGHTLY SO IN MR. SALAM'S VIEW, THAT THEY HAD BEEN NEGLECTED BY THEIR OWN GOVERNMENT FOR YEARS. MR. SALAM NOTED THAT MARONITES IN SOUTH ARE NOT AS ARROGANT AND SELF-CENTERED AS THOSE IN MT. LEBANON, AND THAT THE MARONITE PATRIARCH COMES FROM THE SOUTH. HE THOUGHT THIS MIGHT BE A POSITIVE ELEMENT IN WORKING OUT COMPROMISE SOLUTION IN COURSE OF A LEBANESE-LEBANESE DIALOGUE.

9. COMMENT. MALEK SALAM'S REMARKS ABOUT THE RELATIONS BETWEEN SUNNI LEBANESE OF BEIRUT AND THE PALESTINIANS ECHO THOSE MADE TO CHARGE FEW DAYS AGO BY CHAFIC WAZZAN, CHAIRMAN OF MODERATE ISLAMIC GROUP, OF WHICH MALEK SALAM IS ALSO MEMBER. BOTH BELIEVE PALESTINIANS HAVE GONE TOO FAR AND DEEPLY
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PAGE 05 BEIRUT 08163 271548Z

RESENT ALLIANCE BETWEEN PALESTINIANS AND JUNBLATT'S NM. MALEK SALAM'S REMARKS ON SOUTH LEBANON REFLECT WHAT SEEMS TO BE WILLINGNESS OF MODERATE MOSLEMS TO ACCEPT A SITUATION WHICH PREVENTS FEDAYEEN FROM PROVOKING ISRAEL, AS THEY DID IN PAST WITH DISASTROUS RESULTS TO LEBANON'S BODY POLITIC.
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Margaret P. Grafeld
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